

Aldous Huxley's Bokanovsky ("Bokanowski" de Aldous Huxley)

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Source: *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Mar., 1989), pp. 85-89

Published by: SF-TH Inc

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239919>

Accessed: 07/04/2010 10:56

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James Sexton

Aldous Huxley's Bokanovsky

It is a commonplace that many of the 10,000 officially approved surnames in the *Brave New World* belonged to giants of the Capitalist and Communist worlds: Ford and Hoover in the former; Marx and Trotsky in the latter. However, some of the once instantly recognizable names have become obscure as reputations have dimmed. Who but a historian recognizes the name Alfred Mond? Yet Huxley assumed that this important industrialist-politician was sufficiently well-known to allude to him twice in *Point Counter Point* (1928) as well as to give his name to the World-Controller of *Brave New World* (1932). Probably Huxley associated him with the rationalization of industry and multi-national business conglomerates since he was the driving force behind the series of amalgamations of several British chemical firms into the massive multi-national corporation Imperial Chemical Industries, or ICI. He was also apparently the model for H.G. Wells's William Clissold.¹

Another once-famous advocate of the rationalization of industry has completely escaped notice, even though his name lives on in *Brave New World* as the father of the World State's ectogenesis program. I refer, of course, to Bokanovsky. Perhaps the main reason for the absence of critical commentary on the name is that it is Slavic. Presumably readers think of it as a suitably Russian-sounding name and go no further, assuming that Huxley invented it. Such invention would have been unique, however, since all the names Huxley used, even obscure references like Kawaguchi, can be traced to actual or literary eponyms. While he was probably aware of a minor Russian revolutionary, Ivan Vasil'evich Bokhanovsky (1848-1917), Huxley probably had in mind a "Bokanovsky"—again with minor spelling changes—who was far from obscure in French politics of the '20s. Maurice Bokanowski (1879-1928) was a French politician who held important posts in two Third Republic cabinets, and most notably that of Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Aviation in Raymond Poincaré's Union Nationale cabinet from 1926 until Bokanowski's death in March 1928, ironically in a plane crash while on his way to an aviation conference.

Why the name Bokanovsky should have suggested itself as an approved name to the fathers of the *Brave New World* is not far to seek.² First, like his counterpart Mond in England, Maurice Bokanowski was a high-profile advocate of the rationalization of industry as a response to the economic crisis after the Great War, especially as a means of reducing unemployment.

As Georges Bonnefous, a historian of the Third Republic, states (p. 229), M. Bokanowski's rationalizing industry as the true remedy to France's economic ills helped deflect the attacks of the left-wing opposition critics in the French Assembly. In addition, William Shirer tells us that he was a spokesman for the business and financial interests in France (p. 154). Furthermore, references in the conservative Paris daily, *Le Figaro*, show that he was an implacable enemy of instability, both parliamentary and governmental ("Une conférence de M. Bokanowski," p. 3). By November 1927, he was able to announce that "monetary stability could only be compromised from now on by political crises which French common sense will know how to avoid" ("M. Bokanowski montre les résultats de l'Union Nationale"). Indeed, no one in France was more closely associated with the last term of *Brave New World's* motto, "...Stability."

Perhaps Bokanowski's emphasis on stability made him appear to Huxley as cut from the same cloth as a Wellsian "open conspirator." After all, politicians have been replaced by technocrats in the *Brave New World*. Such a change was long advocated by Wells, and its realization in the Fordian era is one of the clearer satiric allusions to Wells's canon. From 1926 on, Bokanowski likewise advocated during the economic crisis, if not the abolition of party politics, at least a de-emphasis of the division of political power along party lines in favor of a coalition of businessmen and technocrats capable of remedying the falling franc by technical measures. Bokanowski's speech made at a meeting of L'Union pour la France in January 1926 could serve as a paradigm of the Wells-Mond line of thinking. Here he reveals his impatience with "the struggles and divisions of parties," adding that the conditions for economic well-being are a "moratorium on politics and the constitution of a strong, durable majority around a program of union uniquely determined by technical necessities" ("A la Salle Wagram," p. 2).

M. Bokanowski's coalition ideas were given full hearing in *Le Figaro*, M. Coty's newspaper; and it is worth noting that a few weeks after Bokanowski's speech to the Amiens Chamber of Commerce (a speech reported on the second page of *Le Figaro*), the lead article in *Le Figaro*, headed "Le Salut financier hors du parlement," advocated the formation of a national union cabinet. An illustration of the degree of urgency with which M. Coty (at least) viewed the economic crisis is his announcement in *Le Figaro* nine days later of a plan to create a *de facto* rival treasury, what he called "La Caisse Autonome d'Amortissement," which would have placed 25 million francs at the disposal of "certain competent and probacious men...for the purposes of maintaining budgetary equilibrium, imposing on politicians a [sense of] order and economy, and restoring the French structure ['l'édifice française']" ("La Caisse," p. 3).

Bokanowski's well-known internationalism—"he had France participate in all the major international exhibitions" (Franceschini)—and his

advocacy of customs reforms which prefigure the Brave New World's anti-protectionist world economy are two other reasons why Huxley alludes to him. As well, the fact that Bokanowski was the Minister of Aviation and a believer in trans-oceanic commercial airlines links him yet more concretely to the world of A.F. 632, where flights from New York to London in the Red Rocket are so punctual that an increase of seven minutes over the estimated arrival time is looked upon as scandalous.

The most telling link between the fictional and the real Bokanowski, however, may lie in the fact that "after the peace, [Bokanowski] returned to the study of economic questions, particularly those concerning the birth rate" (Franceschini). Since Huxley was a frequent visitor to France during Bokanowski's heyday, it is probable that he was aware of his concern with the falling French birthrate (from 30 per 1000 at the beginning of the 19th century to about 15 per 1000 in 1934-38). In any case, it is ironic that the imaginary biologist who perfected the cloning of human beings and thereby solved the economic problem of undesirable birth rates should be named after a politician who advocated government supplements to alleviate the economic hardships of large families (cf. Franceschini). Thus a Third Republic champion of the family (and the precursor of *la politique de la famille*, which helped raise the birth rate) is immortalized as the inventor of one of the techniques which help to abolish it.

That Huxley was alluding to a contemporary French politician is clear and of some historical interest. What is less apparent in establishing that Huxley refers to Maurice Bokanowski is that this helps support the evidence marshalled by Jerome Meckier to push back the date of composition of *Brave New World*—or at least its planning—to a time in or before 1928, and in any event well before April 1931, the month Mrs Bedford asserts that Huxley began the book.³

In addition to the neglected "preface" to *Brave New World* that Meckier cites, at least three other late-'20s' works had been mentioned by Huxley before late 1929: Fülöp-Miller's *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*, Berdayev's *Un nouveau moyen age*, and Séché's *La Morale de la machine*.⁴ And just as these three works impressed themselves upon Huxley's consciousness, the reports in the French press of Bokanowski's speeches and actions would have been noted by Huxley as well. But after Bokanowski's untimely death, he ceased to be spoken of in the press, confirming Hamlet's mordant reflection that a man's memory may outlive him six months. Had Huxley begun writing *Brave New World* in 1931, it is most unlikely that he would have alluded to a figure who three years after his death was only moderately well-known.

NOTES

1. For a lengthy discussion of Huxley's allusions to Mond's career, see my article "*Brave New World* and the Rationalization of Industry," *English Studies in*

Canada, 12 (1986):424-39. For a brief discussion of the Mond-Wells connection, see Warren Wagar's *H.G. Wells and the World State* (New Haven, 1961).

2. The French novelist Georges Duhamel also apparently alludes to Bokanowski, giving the name Bouchonoff to the founder of a Laputan academy which venerates rationalized industry and neon advertising in his 1931 satire *Les jumeaux de Vallangoujart*.

3. See Jerome Meckier on this point.

4. These works provide a rationale for Huxley's attack on materialism. He, of course, took his epigraph from Berdayev's work, and he had written an approving review of Fülöp Miller's book as well as a critical one of Séché's. See my article for Séché's place in Huxley's satire.

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RÉSUMÉ.

James Sexton. «**Bokanowski**» de Aldous Huxley.—L'allusion que Huxley fait à l'homme politique français Maurice Bokanowski souligne la satire de l'organisation scientifique du travail dans *Le meilleur des mondes*. Comme son homologue anglais, Alfred Mond, Bokanowski était un fervent partisan de la rationalisation scientifique du travail. Il pensait qu'elle apporterait la stabilité économique et politique. Également, sa préférence pour une coalition dirigeante d'hommes d'affaire et de technocrates le rapproche d'un autre sujet satirique de Huxley: le «open conspirateur» de H.G. Wells. L'allusion à Bokanowski fait également référence à l'anarchiste russe Ivan Bokhanovskii (1848-1917). Ainsi un seul symbole unit un héros de la droite et un de la gauche dans le panthéon du «meilleur des mondes». De la même façon, le roman rappelle, à la manière satirique, les buts paradoxalement identiques du Capitalisme et du Communisme. (JS)

Abstract.—*Huxley's allusion to French politician Maurice Bokanowski adds emphasis to the satire on the rationalization of industry in Brave New World, for like his English counterpart Sir Alfred Mond, Bokanowski was a high-profile advocate of rationalized industry as a means to achieving economic and political stability. His preference for a governing coalition of businessmen and technocrats makes him resemble another object of Huxley's satire: H.G. Wells's open conspirator. The "Bokanovsky" allusion also suggests the Russian anarchist Ivan Bokhanovsky (1848-1917), thereby uniting in one symbol torch bearers of the political right and the left in the pantheon of the Brave New World, just as the novel often satirically points to the paradoxical sameness of Communist and Capitalist ends. (JS)*